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Greece threatens U.S. bases agreement

ATHENS, Greece (UPI) _ Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou warned the United States that his government will force the removal of U.S. bases from Greece by the end of next year unless Washington withdraws charges Athens had contacts with Arab terrorists.

The Socialist prime minister told reporters Sunday before leaving for a European Community meeting in Brussels, Belgium, that "there can be no (bases negotiations, even on procedural matters, unless there is a complete, official and public retraction by the U.S. government."

Papandreou said the accusations, made by U.S. Ambassador Robert Keely at a meeting in Athens on Thursday with Greek Foreign Minister Carolos Papoulias, were untrue. U.S. officials have accused Greece of having contacts with alleged terrorist Abu Nidal.

"If by the end of 1988 we haven't received a retraction from the U.S. government, the bases will go," he said.

Diplomats saw the premier's remarks as a further deterioration in already strained Greek-American relations.

The Washington Times, quoting Arab sources in Athens, reported today that Abu Nidal bought apartments in two suburbs adjacent to Athens airport 18 months ago. The newspaper said it was unclear what the apartments were being used for and there was no evidence of any terrorist activity.

Thursday's meeting between Keely and Papoulias was to have opened discussions on the renewal of the Greek-U.S. bases agreement.

Instead, Keely expressed official concern about alleged contacts between Greece and Abu Nidal, Papandreou told reporters.

"It is not true that Greece has held any kind of negotiations with terrorist organizations _ and especially with Abu Nidal _ in exchange for keeping terrorism out of Greek soil," Papandreou said.

"That report was false," Papandreou said of a New York Times report of alleged contacts between Greek officials and Abu Nidal.

"The U.S. government has no right to denounce or condemn any government for such behavior since the United States sold weapons to Iran in order to obtain the release of American hostages," Papandreou said.

He said such allegations hurt tourism and foreign investment in Greece, and warned that Americans were wrong if they thought "this kind of blackmail" could force Greece into renewing the bases agreement, due to expire in 1988.

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